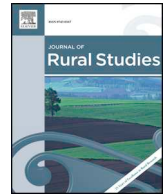




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From rural to urban to rural to global: 300 years of compulsory schooling in rural Norway

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between the school and the local community in Norway from the beginning of compulsory schooling early in the 18th century to the present day globalised context. This historical overview focuses on three main points. First, how the political struggle for an equitable education provision during the first half of the 20th century gradually resulted in rural schooling approaching the urban version as to school size and content. Second, how popular mobilisation against extensive school centralisation, new research on the functioning of small schools, and new perspectives on learning, knowledge and sociology of education during the 1960s and 1970s paved the way for rural schools to actually be able to serve rural pupils and rural communities. Third, how since the 1980s, various aspects of globalisation have impacted on rural education provision in ways which makes it less responsive to the specific conditions of rural communities.

1. Introduction: ‘rurality’ – gone?

In most literature on education, the word ‘rural’ refers to the kind of settlements or communities that are not ‘urban’. Rural areas that are particularly ‘non-urban’ are in the British context often referred to as ‘sparsely populated areas’ (SPA).¹ Other definitions allow for classifying areas according to degrees of ‘rurality’ such as population density, distance from a town or a city, and predominant occupational structure. With improved communication facilities such as roads, bridges and bus services, an area with a specific population density and occupational structure may, however, be less ‘rural’ than it used to be. In addition to these characteristics, ‘rural’ is associated with dimensions of a social or relational nature that differ from those of urban settings. In an educational context such dimensions are important. The question is: how important are such aspects of ‘rural’ in the present globalised world?

Previously the home, neighbourhood, local community, school and working life at the place of residence were the dominant socialising agents for children and young people. Today smartphones, tablets, computers, computer games, TV, and video films reach children everywhere, from pre-school age onwards and expose them to a flow of impressions, impulses and information, generated from all over the globe. These massive bombardments of stimuli strike children directly without being filtered through family, playmates or teachers, whether in Oslo or on a Lofoten island, whether in London or in a Lake District village.

In the light of such globalisation impacts, the question is whether it still makes sense to speak about rural minds or rural perspectives. Giddens (1990) presents his theory about the increasingly free, disconnected position of the modern individual; whether in relation to family, social group, local community, or home environment. This *disembedding* or free setting of young people to shape their own lives opens opportunities for young people. However, it can also create uncertainty, frustration and risk of failure since plans and ambitions may be founded more on a glorified picture of life in the big outside world than on factual trialling their own capacities in realistic circumstances.

This enormous worldwide flow of information and the more open and widespread communication between countryside and cities, between north and south, may weaken traditional differences in ways of thinking, priorities and patterns of action among people from different regions, from sparsely or more densely populated areas, from peripheral or central locations. As ‘new’ knowledge and new trends often are produced in the economic, political and cultural strongholds, that is larger cities, or at least filtered through urban channels, it may be reasonable to believe that it is the urban culture with its way of life that is communicated through the mass media.

Arguably, it is the small social units found in sparsely populated areas that are the more vulnerable and, therefore, more prone to lose their specific characteristics as local communities. Not only have the external stimuli become stronger over recent decades, but in addition,

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¹ In the Scandinavian context SPA-municipalities have less than 30 per cent of the population living in places with more than 200 people.

the local arenas where people meet and interact are becoming fewer and weaker. The previous working togetherness in the primary sector of the economy is largely gone, and several of the traditional places where local people met incidentally; such as the local shop, the post office, the bank, and, in particular, the school; may no longer be present in the community.

Given the developments described above, some social scientists and rural researchers have been tempted to abandon the concept of “local community” and rather refer to the geographical term of “place” (e.g. [Heggen et al., 2001](#)). Living geographically close, even in a small place, does not necessarily mean that people hold much in common, or that they constitute a “community” ([Urry, 1999](#)). Thus, we may question whether there are *local* communities, *local* cultures or *local* identities. Are we witnessing a cultural homogenization within our countries making the whole concept of *rural communities* superfluous? Is it no longer the case that people living in certain places or local areas have distinct feelings of identity, belongingness, shared values or perspectives?

Even though the people of a certain rural place no longer have a lot in common, it is nevertheless the case that certain characteristics are likely to be shared such as nature and climate, history and traditions, family relations, and experiences relating to leisure time activities. We will argue that the notion of *local community* is still relevant although the feeling of being a community, of integration, or of attachment to the place may be weak or strong, or weaker than before ([Corbett, 2014](#)). Thus, the impact of the local community as a socialising agent for children and youngsters will vary accordingly. Several Norwegian studies on identity formation among rural youth give reason to modify the concept of modernity suggested by Giddens and others who stress an extreme individualism and “cultural free setting” ([Ziehe, 1995](#)) from the group, the home environment and the local community ([Bæck, 2004](#); [Davidsen, 2009](#); [Paulgaard, 2001](#); [Wiborg, 2001](#)). Interviews with rural youth from six European countries, showed considerable variation in urbanisation and “cultural free setting” between and within countries ([Dax and Machold, 2002](#)). The Finnish case, in particular, supports the Norwegian studies: local identity and attachment are far from lost ([Muilu and Onkalo, 2002](#)). [Corbett \(2007\)](#), commenting on experiences from Nova Scotia, underlines the importance of not ignoring the specific experiences, attitudes and outlook on life that children and youngsters from rural communities bring to the educational scene.

2. Aim and approach

Despite demographic changes, a weakening or even breakdown of traditional rural economies, fewer natural meeting places and the global urban dominance of the information flow and cultural stimuli, we have concluded that ‘rural’ and ‘rurality’ are still meaningful concepts. To be raised in a rural setting is still in many ways different from that of being brought up in an urban one.

In the present paper we describe and conceptualize how changing views of the relationship between the school and the local communities have affected compulsory schooling in Norway over a time span of 300 years and point out potential consequences of various trends. To carry out this undertaking we have explored the consecutive national school acts and curricula in respective original documents and in publications listing various acts such as [Dokka \(1967, 1988\)](#), [Høigård and Ruge \(1947\)](#), and [Myhre \(1978\)](#). We have also analysed changing ideas as to the task of education, shifting conceptions and perspectives on child development and learning, and draw on theories of knowledge including the relationship between local and general knowledge, and on research related to the functioning of education in rural settings.

The fact that Norway may claim to be one of the first countries worldwide to introduce compulsory primary education for the rural population, makes Norway a fruitful “case study” for shedding light on the changes that have happened over time. With its traditionally strong

links to Denmark and Sweden and to a large extent also to European culture, politics and economy generally, analysis of rural education in a Norwegian context, will bear relevance beyond narrow national borders.

3. Pre-1900: compulsory education is rural

Norway, as most European countries, was predominantly rural when compulsory basic education was established in the 18th and 19th centuries. Actually, as late as by 1900, around 80 per cent of the population in countries such as Finland, Sweden and Norway lived in sparsely populated. Thus, when the Danish king of Denmark-Norway in 1739 issued an act for “... schools in the countryside of Norway ...” it was in effect a *rural* school act.

These early initiatives for compulsory schooling for rural dwellers, possibly the earliest internationally, were instigated by the pietist movement stressing the importance of every individual being able to read the holy book. The urban population was left out because universal reading skills were considered to have been, or was about to be, achieved without specific law regulations. As the curriculum was restricted to reading, writing, religion and gradually also arithmetic, the question of urban or rural biased content, was not much of an issue. However, the rural Norwegian population was offered a “Danish school” (*dansk skole*), as it was formally referred to, and all the religious texts that should be read were in Danish writing ([Høigård and Ruge, 1947](#)).

In terms of organisation this early compulsory rural schooling was clearly of the multi-grade type where one teacher catered for all the children in the community whatever age, simultaneously. Up to around 1850, urban primary schools for the lower classes in Norway, as in other European countries, were in fact one-teacher schools catering for several age-groups in the same class ([Dokka, 1967](#); [Little, 2006](#)). In the rural areas, with no infrastructure for school transportation, the schools had to be small and located near where the pupils lived. The rural teachers worked on an ambulatory basis serving several places where 10–30 pupils across age and grade levels could be gathered in the most suitable private home. Separate school buildings were the exception until around 1880.

When the struggle for improved education provision for the urban poor and working class children gained momentum during the second half of the 19th century, the system of big “multi-grade” one-teacher schools in towns and cities was gradually abandoned and replaced by schools with one teacher for each grade-/age-level. The very first Norwegian school act for towns and cities of 1848, stated that the number of pupils in one class should not exceed 60. Economic growth and increasing complexity in the urban communities during the last part of the 19th century naturally nourished steps to expand compulsory education in terms of subject coverage as well as length of schooling. Rural education was lagging behind. Whereas the early school acts for towns and cities (1848, 1889) more or less just formalised existing practices regarding organisation and subject coverage, the acts guiding rural education (1739, 1827, 1860, 1889) made new demands on the school authorities at the local and national levels to improve the schools, that is, make the rural school provision similar to the urban ([Høigård and Ruge, 1947](#)).

One such improvement of rural education was the abolishment of ambulatory schooling as the normal school provision in rural areas. The 1860 National Rural School Act stated that if at least 30 school age children by their own means could reach one school site, a permanent or fixed schoolhouse should be built. The 1889 Rural Act made ambulatory schooling the exception. It also stated that grade level divisions should be the norm, whether fully divided into 7 classes, or if there were fewer pupils, into 2 or 3 classes catering for different grade groups. In a school-local community context it may be interesting to note that during the 1850s, before the 1860 Rural Education Act had passed the *Storting* (Parliament), there was fierce public debate on

whether it was a good idea to bring the ambulatory schools using family homes as class rooms to an end. The kind of arguments voiced by some rural politicians and teachers were also articulated by a prominent author of the time, Vinje: "... the ambulatory school is better than the fixed (permanent) school as a place for real popular education (literally "people upbringing") and it is a school which interacts with real life rather than stand outside it as the permanent school [with a separate school house] does" (Dokka, 1967, p. 36, our translation). In *Grassroots Resistance* Edvardsen (2011) documents how families in scattered small communities in Northern Norway, during the late 1800s, resisted sending their 10–14 years old children to school in periods of good fishing or during the harvesting season. The transition from ambulatory schooling in the crofter's or fisherman's humble houses to the more distant schoolhouses, quite often resulted in increasing absenteeism among the elder schoolchildren most needed in the subsistence fishing and farming economy. Thus, concerns about rural schools being ignorant to, or isolated from, its community are by no means an invention by modern educational sociologists (see below).

During the latter part of the 19th Century we were witnessing a strong national movement in Norway fighting for national sovereignty after 400 years under Danish rule and since 1814 sharing king and foreign ministry with Sweden. Rural Norway with its people, working life, culture, language, and scenery became important in the construction of a Norwegian identity, a struggle that was reflected in politics, literature, music and painting. The 1889 Rural School Act was highly influenced by this upgrading of 'rurality': the school should serve the people; be governed by local people (not the state or the church); and, interestingly, the school act also stated that each municipality should develop its own curriculum. Due to the lack of resources and competence this latter requirement was rarely met as almost all were just blueprints of a centrally developed curriculum plan (Høigård and Ruge, 1947; Solstad, 1981). This 1889 Act, although in principle concerned about rural education being rural, also signalled the beginning of the struggle to bring rural primary education up to the standards of towns and cities, a struggle that to a large extent was continued throughout the following decades.

4. 1900–1970: urbanising rural education

At the same time as the 1989 Rural School Act represented a strong step forward for rural education in Norway by abandoning ambulatory schooling, increasing the annual amount of schooling and giving local people a greater say in the running of the school, the act also gave the impetus for a period in which rural education gradually became urbanised. This 'urbanisation' was in no way one that was openly and actively chosen, but may rather be seen as an unintended consequence of the political left's struggle for equal educational opportunities across geographical and social groupings. This radicalisation of Norwegian politics gained ground towards the end of the 1800s and became more powerful during the first half of the 20th century. From 1896, secondary education started after grade 5 (*middelskole/realskole, gymnas*). A main objective was therefore to make secondary education more accessible by allowing pupils who had completed seven years of the public urban primary school direct access without having to step back two years. This required the content of the public urban primary school to be adjusted to the demands of the urban middle class based secondary education. By 1920 the full seven years of the urban primary school (*folkeskole*) was *de facto* accepted as "good enough" to qualify pupils for an academic type secondary education beginning in grade 8.

The above development contributed to the superior status of the urban schools compared to rural ones. Thus, professionals and politicians concerned with improving rural education tried to take the kind of legislative and financial steps likely to make rural schools as urban like as possible in terms of content, and, as far as possible, also in terms of organisation. As early as 1926 a Parliamentary School Commission (PSC, *Parlamentarisk skolekommission*) made this view explicit when

stating: "If you ask what can be done to lift the quality of rural schools, there is no doubt about the answer: first and foremost, by reducing the number of grade levels in the class" (PSC 1926, p. 26). Still, not much happened during the depression of the 1920s and 1930s or during the German occupation. Then, after World War II, when necessary infrastructure in terms of roads, bridges, tunnels, ferries and cars improved, a wave of school closures occurred. During 1950–70 the number of primary schools in rural municipalities across the country was reduced from 5325 to 2500 (Solstad, 1978).

Despite a long struggle to improve rural education by approaching the standards of urban schools, Norway did not have a common national school act for rural and urban municipalities before 1959. For instance, up to this year rural pupils were entitled to far less teaching periods annually than were urban pupils, less than half before 1936 and 60 per cent during 1936–1959 (Myhre, 1978). Up to 1959 the reduced amount of statutory annual schooling in rural municipalities made it possible for one teacher to cover two one-teacher schools (all grade-levels in one class), so the pupils did attend school only every second week. By practising every second day schooling, a two-class school (grades 1–4; 5–7) needed just one teacher. Two three-class schools (1–3; 4–5; 6–7) could be run by three teachers only, generally by one teacher at each school being responsible for the two highest classes attending school every second day, and one additional teacher catering for the bottom class of both schools implying for these youngest pupils one week of schooling and one week off. To increase the amount of annual schooling for rural children to that of the urban pupils, obviously came at a considerable cost since teachers' salaries make up around 80 per cent of the total running costs of schools.

During the 1960s a process of expanding compulsory education took off as municipalities were invited to be part of a trial period for a nine years compulsory comprehensive school. One condition which many municipalities was asked to meet before being accepted to join the trial programme, was to "improve" their primary school provision first and foremost by closing down as many small schools as possible. To establish grade-levels 7–9 as a lower secondary school called "the youth school" (*ungdomsskule*), as part of the expanded 9 years compulsory school provision, it was regarded as necessary that the number of pupils at each grade level should be at least 60. This number of pupils allowed for at least three classes, one grammar type, one mixed theoretical-practical type and one for pupils preparing for vocational training. To meet this target number of pupils two or up to four sparsely populated municipalities had to plan for one shared youth school located as strategically as possible to minimize school transportation or the need for away-from-home lodging during the school week.

The Education Act of 1969 covered primary (grades 1–6) as well as lower secondary school (grades 7–9) school, and a new national curriculum (a provisional version appeared 1971) may be seen as the end – and peak – of a three-quarter century long urbanisation process of Norwegian rural education. In terms of organisation, amalgamation of primary schools had, as we have seen, reduced the number of schools in rural municipalities to less than half of the number by 1900, and the proportion of primary school children entitled to school transportation rose from 6.5 per cent in 1950 to 22.4 in 1970 (Solstad, 1978). For the grade 7 pupils in the former final year of primary schooling, the extent of school transportation and away-from-home lodging had risen tremendously during this period. Regarding educational content, the new national school act and curriculum plans made no difference whatsoever between the educational provision in rural and urban areas.

5. 1970–2000: 'ruralising' rural education

Even before the legislative changes around 1970, there were numerous local protests throughout the country against the closure of rural primary schools and the implementation of the highly centralised model for lower secondary education during the trial period of the 1960s. The taken for granted conception of larger schools applying

single-grade classes as superior to smaller multi-grade schools in terms of educational outcomes, was also shaken by research findings. Extensive studies in many countries such as New Zealand (Parkyn, 1952), Norway (Mogstad, 1958; Thrane, 1961), Sweden (Marklund, 1962, 1968), and Finland (Käppi, 1971) were unable to demonstrate learning advantages for pupils attending large schools applying single-grade classes as compared to pupils in small schools depending on multi-grade classes and teaching.

This kind of research findings and the widespread dissatisfaction with the highly centralised lower secondary education referred to above, prompted the (Norwegian) National Council for Innovation in Education (*Forsøksrådet for skoleverket*) to launch a large-scale research project in 1969 – Grissgrendtprosjektet. Through “The Sparsely Populated Area Project” (SPA) 4000 pupils from 55 youth schools (grades 7–9), both “big” schools and “small” schools,² were followed through 1969 to 1972. Data was gathered at school level (e.g. size, teacher coverage, and teaching materials), at individual pupil level (e.g. intelligence tests; achievement tests and exam results in various subjects), and on school transportation, attitudes to school, future education and work, place of living, spare time activities, and physical fitness. The study indicated: i) no statistically significant differences in academic achievement between pupils at big or small schools, or between highly or moderately centralised schools, ii) pupils considered lower secondary education to be more relevant for those living in urban like settings, than in the countryside; for those planning for white collar occupations, than for those planning for farming or fishing; and for those planning for academic type higher secondary education, than for those going for vocational training, iii) as a group, pupils depending on school transport were less physically fit than those who reached school by foot or bike, iv) long bus journeys had a negative impact on many pupils’ well-being, and v) long/or time-consuming school transportation reduced participation in spare time activities and interfere with sleeping routines. (Solstad, 1978; Solstad and Thelin, 2006).

By and large these research findings have been substantiated and complemented in more recent studies. The meta-studies of Pratt (1986) and Veenman (1995) conclude that available evidence in no way points to large schools being superior to small ones applying multi-grade teaching. This was confirmed in an Austrian study by Hörman (2000) and a Swedish one by Åberg-Bengtsson (2004). Hattie’s (2009) conclusion of a moderate, but statistically significant correlation between pupils’ test results and size of school is based solely on American high schools varying in size between a few hundreds and several thousands, thus bearing no relevance whatsoever to rural primary or lower secondary schools in Norway – or elsewhere. In his synthesis of available research on the quality of multi-grade versus single grade primary schools, his conclusion corresponds to the above mentioned meta-studies.

Also the effects of school journeys on pupils’ physical fitness and general wellbeing, have largely been confirmed since the 1970s (e.g. Amundsvén and Øines, 2003; Cooper et al., 2006; Nilsson and Raundalen, 1985; Sjølie, 2002). A relationship has also been indicated between extensive school transportation and the increasing occurrence of overweight and obesity among school age children (Heyerdal et al., 2012; Mendoza et al., 2011; Mendoza and Liu, 2014).

The documentation provided by the SPA Project and other studies, combined with the popular dissatisfaction with school centralisation, resulted in a change of national policy in regard to acceptable size of primary and lower secondary schools. Throughout the 1970s and most of the 1980s, primary school closures almost came to a complete halt (Solstad, 2009). In many sparsely populated municipalities there was a *de facto* decentralisation of the upper level of compulsory schooling,

7–9 grades. Small such units were added to existing primary schools, creating small “combined children and youth schools”, often practising multi-grade teaching also at the secondary level. This decentralisation of lower secondary education was made possible because the original model of operating with three distinct educational programmes was abandoned as early as in 1971. The new model implied that more of the necessary differentiation in the organisation of the pupils’ learning had to be practised within the classroom setting.

The above-mentioned research findings and model change reduced the pressure on rural compulsory education to conform to the urban school organisation. Furthermore, new theories of learning (Bernstein, 1971, 1977; Hunt, 1961; Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978), alternative perspectives on society and its institutions (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) and the so-called New Sociology of Education (Demaine, 1981; Eggleston, 1977; Karabel and Halsey, 1977; Young, 1971) paved the way for adjusting the content of education to the population it was serving. This implied taking account of the particular knowledge base and skills the pupils came to school with and the preconditions and needs of the local community. According to these theories and perspectives on learning, knowledge and society, national curricula could be designed to allow variation in how to achieve an equitable education provision under very different geographical, cultural and social circumstances. The Norwegian national curriculum for compulsory education of 1974 (M74³) was to some extent influenced by these international waves as the following passage from a chapter on Learning materials demonstrates: “In some subjects learning materials may be chosen according to local circumstances” (M74, p. 25, our translation).

This softening of longstanding conceptions as to preferable school size and educational content cleared the way for research and development projects and programmes which subsequently provided further momentum away from the political, and predominantly also professional, ideal of equalising rural education with urban provisions. In the following we will briefly comment on the three most important ones. The first, the *Lofoten Project*, focused on how to make the education provision in island fishing communities more relevant to the local and regional circumstances. The second, the *Rødøy Project*, studied the functioning of very small school units at lower secondary level, while the third, the *District Active School Project*, aimed at fostering entrepreneurial skills and attitudes among rural pupils.

The *Lofoten Project* (1973–76), questioned both the organisation and the content of compulsory schooling. First, the project drew attention to the fact that the upper part of compulsory education, grades 7–9, simply by its heavy demands on the pupils’ time, prevented youngsters from participating in activities related to the seasonal cod fishery on which the local communities and the whole region was heavily dependent. An important part of the project was to stimulate the development of locally/regionally relevant reading materials as well as methods of active, and environmentally based, approaches to learning. The aim was to make a school that gave value to the local community and region and thus became more relevant and conducive to the pupils’ learning as well as their self-confidence and potential for agency at the local level as well as in society in general (Solstad, 1981).

Applying an action research approach, the *Lofoten Project* was organised as a follow-up co-operation between teachers at seven lower secondary schools across the Lofoten islands and a research group. Whereas attempts at changing the time schedule to allow for the pupils’ participation in work related to the seasonal cod fishery met institutionalized frames that were hard to bypass, efforts to include working methods and locally relevant educational content in the curriculum, did have some measure of success (Solstad, 1981). The

² In the late 1960s some municipalities were allowed to establish “small” lower secondary schools having lower number of pupils than the standard requirements set.

³ The term *Mønsterplan* (literally “Pattern Plan” or “Model Plan”) of 1974 replaced the term *Normalplan* of 1939 to indicate a less specified curriculum in terms of content, progress and achievement-level specifications.

research groups' extensive involvement in writing and in-service education stimulated development work throughout the country aiming at making education more locally relevant (Karlsen, 1991). The project ideas also made inroads into the 1987 national curriculum which in principle allowed rural schools to be rural.

The *Rødøy Project* was established by The National Council for Primary and Lower Secondary Education (*Grunnskolerådet*) as a follow-up study during 1975–80 of an extreme case of decentralising lower secondary education (grades 7–9) in an island municipality,⁴ in which a lower secondary school unit was attached to each of the altogether 11 primary schools. Until 1975 all 7–9 grade pupils in the municipality went to one central school forcing most of the parents to accept away-from-home lodging for their 13–15 years old children during the school weeks. The project focused both on formal school learning, academically and socially, and on the extended role of the school as an integrated and active part of the local communities on tiny islands or in isolated fjord settlements. Developing locally based reading materials and network building between the schools were part of the scheme. Formal school learning was found to improve compared to when pupils had been forced to move away from home to attend the central youth school. In addition, the positive role which a well-run school could play in strengthening such remote communities - culturally, socially, educationally, and, by implication over time, possibly also economically - was clearly documented. The study also demonstrated the crucial role of the head teacher and teachers for the school to play an active role in the community it served (Eilertsen, 1981; Eilertsen and Solstad, 1982). Study findings were widely disseminated and stimulated nationally the emerging idea of allowing diversity in education provision in terms of the size of primary and lower secondary school units, locally developed reading materials, and the notion of the school taking an active role in the local community.

The *District Active School*-project reflected the general concern among politicians from around 1980 for lack of available jobs and population decline in many rural areas of Norway. The main idea was to stimulate the development of attitudes, knowledge and skills among the younger population to enhance job-creating initiatives in their own community or district. The project began in 1990 with financial support from several ministries (of Education, Fishery, Agriculture and Work). Two main strategies were chosen: (i) co-operation with teacher education institutions for organising post-certificate half year courses for teachers, and (ii) co-operation and network building with local school authorities and schools to establish *pupils' enterprises*. The purpose was to develop entrepreneurial capacities among the pupils. These activities contributed to a general acceptance of schools taking co-responsibility for the fate of the communities they were serving (Karlsen, 2003; Nybø and Tungland, 1994; Solstad, 2000). A Nordic survey on educating for entrepreneurship in primary and secondary schools, found such activity to be most frequent in Norwegian and Danish schools where almost half of the primary/lower secondary schools were involved. However, since each school only had one or perhaps two such enterprises, the proportion of pupils involved was much lower at around eight percent in Norway and five in Denmark. The study identified various kinds of (local) food production, often – and especially in rural areas – in combination with the running of a weakly café for the community, to be the most frequent type of pupil's enterprise. In comparison, less than 20 per cent of schools in Sweden, Finland and Iceland had pupils' enterprises and only three per cent or fewer of the pupils were directly engaged (Karlsen and Solstad, 2002). This difference indicates that the extensive development work in Norway targeting this issue probably had an impact.

Taken together, the acceptance of a rural school structure

compatible with geography and types of settlement, and the acknowledgement of a curriculum reflecting local conditions, indicate *paradigm shift* during the 1970s from that of *equity through equality* (equal treatment) to one of *equity through diversity* (unequal treatment). Thus, in principle, rural schools should be allowed to be rural in terms of size and organisation as well as regarding curricular specifications. This shift manifested itself clearly in the national curricula towards the end of 20th century.

We have already referred to the M74's cautious acceptance of the use of local learning materials. With the new national curriculum of 1987 (M87) this acceptance ("may") was turned into imperatives ("must" and "shall") as the following quotations from the English language version of the M87 exemplifies:

... the school must try to make instruction ... as concrete and relevant as possible. The themes and working methods chosen by the school must clearly show the pupils the connection to situations and conditions which they meet in the society outside the school (p. 29).

The pupils shall also be given equal opportunities to apply their own experience in the work of learning and to develop and extend their knowledge and skills in accordance with their individual aptitudes (p. 33).

These recommendations for, and even instructions to teachers, to build their teaching upon and continually relate it to the pupils' previous and current experiences in their homes and local communities, were made even more explicit in L97.⁵ In this curriculum document it is explained that the subject syllabuses contain "nationally defined subject matter" and "local and individual adaptations" (p. 75). L97 also goes at length in instructing teachers as to the relative weight that should be given to respectively nationally defined and locally adapted subject matters. In grade 1 the local adaptation should make up around 50 per cent of the total subject syllabuses, gradually to be reduced to some 30 per cent by grade 10. Thus, formally, locally relevant or place-based learning which M74 hinted at, gained a very strong standing in the Norwegian national curricula of 1987 and 1997. The *equity through equality* doctrine was definitely abandoned, a conclusion which is even more substantiated when looking for what the curricula say about the school also being actively involved in local community undertakings.

M74 (pp. 22–23), in its section on "The School and Society" (*Skolen og samfunnet*), stresses the importance of the school not being isolated from the outside world and explains that "... the pupils through information and seeing for themselves should learn how the rural community or the town/city functions and how it is governed" (authors' translation). However, the school is not encouraged to take an active role in, or given any co-responsibility for, the local community. Consequently, the idea of a community *active* school had not by the mid-1970s gained sufficient support to deserve being mentioned in a new national curriculum. The next national curriculum, M87, gave more direct support to the compulsory school as an active contributor to community life. Under the sub-heading "The school in the local community" the M87 (p. 28) states:

- As a social institution the school shares responsibility for developing and preserving a good environment for children to grow up in.
- The school premises and facilities, the school's own cultural activities, and the opportunity to use the school as an activity centre for all generations and for different groups, should be exploited as a common resource of the local community.
- The school must make use of the home environment and the local community in its teaching,
- The school must stimulate the pupils to take an active part in the

⁴ Rødøy has a population around 1300 and is located by the Arctic Circle consisting of numerous islands and some fjord communities without direct road connections between each.

⁵ "The Curriculum for the 10-Year Compulsory School in Norway" which is the title of the English version of *Læreplanverket for den 10-årige grunnskolen*, generally referred to as L97.

practical, social and cultural activities of the local community.

These statements clearly underline the school's co-responsibility for the children's growing-up environment and ask the school to open for community use of its physical resources. The pupils should also be urged to engage in out-of-school activities, but not until ten years later, with the already mentioned L97, did Norwegian primary and lower secondary education get the formal mandate to involve itself actively in local community activities not necessarily directly related to the pupils. After first having underlined that the school must initiate contact with its neighbourhood and make educational use of the know-how available, it goes on:

The school shall function as an active source of energy and culture for the local community, and promote contact not only between adults and children, but also with local services and industry. (L97, p. 50)

According to L97 (p. 68) "... schools ought to cooperate with organisations and institutions, in their local communities, that which organise activities aimed at children and young people". In this way the contacts between school and community will be enriched and thereby make it easier for the pupils to visit workplaces, institutions and organisations which then provide the pupils with opportunities for participation, activity and responsibility. These L97 demands and recommendations do qualify for a "yes" to a question of whether the school should involve itself in community active undertakings, a kind of commitment just vaguely hinted at in its predecessor, the M87 (cf. Table 2 below).

As is well documented in the rich literature on school development and school change (e.g. Fullan, 1991; Hall and Hord, 1987; Stenhouse, 1975), one thing is recommendations and even demands from educational authorities at various levels, another is what happens in the individual classroom, school and local community throughout a country. Acknowledging such experiences, the Ministry of Education granted money for a large-scale evaluation of different aspects of the implementation of L97, including the *equity through diversity* model that we are concerned with here. Questionnaire data from a representative sample of 2200 teachers in various types of primary and lower secondary schools, urban as well as rural, allowed a number of conclusions to be drawn as to the degree to which the ideal of diversity was reached: The teachers in small primary and combined primary and lower secondary schools significantly more often than teachers in bigger schools, saw local learning materials as important for an equitable and adapted education; judged locally based teaching as important for identity formation and choice of work and future place of living; felt it compelling to follow the national curriculum's guidelines as to proportion of teaching materials that should be place-based; and, finally, regarded their own attitudes and competence as facilitating the implementation of locally based teaching. The survey also revealed that small rural schools were generally better equipped for implementing place-based learning than larger ones (Solstad, 2004). Although the study could not determine the amount of local community-based teaching that was actually taking place, it demonstrated that most teachers, especially those working in small schools applying multi-grade teaching, regard place-based teaching as important. It is also in these rural schools that the teachers most often see themselves as qualified for carrying out such teaching and judges the available teaching resources as adequate for the task. Thus, rural schools realise that they are allowed to be rural, and many rural teachers feel competent for practising place-based learning which they also carry out.

Still, there is very little evidence of the extent to which schools are active in their local communities as recommended by L97. We have, however, already referred to the occurrence of pupils' enterprises which certainly is one way of demonstrating school community interaction. The Nordic survey did not allow for analyses across the rural-urban dimension, but due to likely effects from the *District Active School-*

programme, the earlier Lofoten and Rødøy projects and the general concern at the time in Norway for job-stimulating undertakings in rural areas, it is likely that a higher proportion of schools and pupils in the rural areas have been involved than the overall national figures indicate. The findings from the L97-evaluation also provide support for this reasoning (Solstad, 2004).

As we will return to, around 1990 there was an increasing concern at municipal level for the relatively high *per capita* costs incurred by running small primary and lower secondary schools. How could such spending be accepted? The dilemma was described by a municipal education officer:

If we are to save the small schools, then we have to attach as many functions as possible to them. the school is the only public institution which is not yet centralised (Rønning et al., 2003, pp. 107–8).

Partly in response to this, a study covering selected case communities and schools from four predominantly rural counties in the northern and north-western parts of Norway was carried out with the aim of identifying the effects of having a school in the local community for the general wellbeing of the locals, and thus also for the sustainability of the community.

Regarding the overall functioning of the small rural school in the community, the study identified four categories of community active approaches on behalf of the school which potentially contributed to making the community richer, stronger and more attractive to the local population: *Extended functions within education and care; the school as a local community and service centre; the school as an arena for social interaction; and the school as a cultural bearer* (Rønning et al. 2003, pp. 107–116.)

We have seen how rural primary education during the last decades of the 1900s was spared aggressive school closures and how lower secondary education was even decentralised in many SPA-municipalities. We have also shown that consecutive national curricula not only allowed for, but actually recommended or even demanded rural schools to adjust their organisation of the pupils' learning to the local circumstances and to engage themselves in local community activities beyond dealing with the pupils 6 h five days a week. However, towards the end of the millennium, powerful international trends threatened to halt, and reverse, these developments. We now turn to how aspects of globalisation have affected rural schools and their relationship to their communities.

6. 1990-Present day: globalising rural education

Based on the close relationship between globalization and neo-liberal capitalism (see Boston et al., 1996; Rizvi and Lingard, 2010; Smith, 2016; Zajda, 2015), we identify in Table 1 four broad and partly overlapping aspects included in most recent volumes on globalization and how it relates to rural communities.

We have already (section 1) commented on the latter of these four aspects of globalisation and pointed to its possible weakening effects on rural identity, rural culture and rural life in general. We now turn to the three other faces of globalisation listed in Table 1 to demonstrate how they tie up to a number of legislative and general policy measures and developments of importance for rural schools and communities during the last three decades. Although the accurate specifications of changes and developments are drawn from the case of Norway, similar developments are to be found in most other European countries and beyond.

Perhaps the single most important neo-liberal inspired legislation from the point of view of rural education, was the introduction of a New Income System (NIS) for the municipalities in 1986 by which money was transferred from national to municipal level on the basis of an annual block grant replacing a complicated system of earmarked grants to the municipalities for their running of education, social and health responsibilities, water supply etc. For many SPA municipalities, as long

Table 1
Selected characteristics of globalization and their possible consequences for rural communities.

Aspects of globalization	Potential negative impacts on rural education and rural communities
Neo-liberalism: Competition as the driving force for progress; free choice; stressing the individual rather than the collective good.	Minimising the public sector; privatization; deregulation; decentralisation of power → small, peripheral organisations, institutions and communities unable to compete successfully. Per unit costs too high in SPA-areas
New Public Management (NPM): The introduction of business models for governance and management in the public sector; accountability in terms of spending and output down to the individual unit.	Pupils, parents and teachers as consumers; management by objectives, a stress on cost-cutting and efficiency → effects of school community interaction not measured, small rural municipalities, small school units particularly at risk.
Supra-national institutions: The emergence of institutions like EU, EES, WB, OECD, EFTA, PISA, etc.	Formal regulations or requests (e.g. EU) or powerful recommendations (e.g. OECD) → limit the freedom of national authorities to protect and support small remote communities and areas being exposed to harsh climate, costly transport etc.
ICT-driven compression of space and time: Globalised, mainly urban based, cultural values and expressions reach out immediately and unfiltered to everyone everywhere.	Communal ties and identities may weaken, and the sustainability and renewal of local rural livelihoods undermined.

as the state level accepted the specific network of schools, there was no economic incentive to close down or amalgamate schools since the necessary money came as earmarked grants. Actually, in some cases a highly decentralised school structure might even be a budgetary advantage (Solstad, 1978). Interestingly, during the parliamentary debate before the passing of the NIS legislation, a member of the *Storting* asked the Minister of Education if this model for financing primary and lower secondary schools would not pave the way for massive school closures. The Minister of Education at the time replied that the Ministry would see to that the municipalities did not close schools for *financial reasons* (O.tid, 1984–85). However, the national level did in 1992 pass a New Municipal Act, which in effect gave the municipalities substantially more freedom to decide upon school structures without state level interference. Taken together these two legislations based on the ideas of decentralisation and deregulation, that is the transfer of power from national to local level, resulted in widespread centralisation of school provision in rural areas. The municipalities had the financial motive to save money by closing schools, and they had the power to do so, even if the declared national policy still was that of keeping a relatively decentralised school structure throughout the country.

Since the full impact of the NIS in the mid-1990s, around 50 schools have been closed annually on a national basis. The SPA-municipalities have been particularly hit. During 1990–2015 the number of schools in the altogether around 140 such municipalities had fallen from 500 to 300 (Solstad and Solstad, 2015). Although a large number of the closed down schools are small with falling annual enrolment, this survey also shows that there is an increasing tendency to axe schools with 50 or more pupils, which in a Norwegian rural context are not small at all. During the period 2011–15 schools with 50 + pupils make up almost 25 per cent of the closed down schools compared with none of this size in 1991–95. Furthermore, since 1990 we have been witnessing a willingness to go for school closures even when such closures force pupils to accept school journeys of 20–30 km or more. Whereas less than one in ten of the closed down schools during 1991–95 were located more than 20 km from the neighbouring “new” school, this apply to more than 20 per cent of the 2011–15-closed schools. These observations indicate that loss of the local school does not only affect very tiny communities relatively close to other somewhat larger places. It also happens in larger communities with a pupil population above 50 even when the distance to a neighbouring school is 20–30 km or more. During the 1970s, before the Norwegian oil boom made the country one of the world's richest, schools were not axed for financial reasons, whereas since the late 1980s, budgetary concerns most often constitute the very reason for closing down schools – contrary to proclaimed national policies.

Globalisation has affected rural education in less obvious ways than these direct legislative measures. The NPM-related focus on efficiency in terms of lowest possible per unit costs, introducing private business models for running public services, and introducing various accountability measures, may all work to the disadvantage of rural schools, especially the very small ones with five or less teachers. For instance,

the international testing regimes such as PISA, often accompanied by additional national ones, allow for comparisons and competition between nations, counties, municipalities, schools and even individual teachers as to achievements defined as pupils' average test results in a few selected academic subjects. In Norway, at the national level we have seen several regulations being implemented with the intention to “improve” our mediocre standing on international league tables.

Arguably, the strong recommendations for place-based learning in L97, might, according to general reasoning, be likely to reduce the teachers' efforts to prepare their pupils to perform optimally on the various national and international tests. When a new national curriculum was launched in 2006, programmatically titled “The Knowledge Promotion Plan” (*Kunnskapsløftet – LK06*), the section in L97 that called for a locally oriented school (Principles and Guidelines for Compulsory Schooling) was left out. Nor is there any mentioning of the pedagogical use of local teaching resources or the school's active role in the local community in the new overarching values and principles for primary and secondary education which was approved in 2017.⁶ Thus, the open support and urge for schools in rural areas to function as “real” rural schools in the national curricula of 1987 (M87) and 1997 (L97), were skipped in LK06 and does not seem to be on the agenda with the current renewal of the curricula. This reduced concern at national political level for the role of the school in the community, does reflect the general neo-liberal focus on the individual person at the expense of the social setting to which he/she belongs.

In Norway it has been a long tradition for a broad teacher education, formally qualifying teachers to teach across all subjects at compulsory school level, leaving to the head teacher's discretion to allocate teachers to classes and subjects. This concept of the *general teacher* (*allmennlærer*) was abandoned in 2010 with the introduction of a two-track teacher education model, one track qualifying for teaching grades 1–7 and the other for 5–10. Specifications were also introduced as to minimum length of university level studies to qualify for teaching in Norwegian, English and mathematics. Such PISA-driven measures are likely to increase staffing problems generally, but more so in small rural schools (Østerud et al., 2015). Head teachers of small combined primary and lower secondary school have already expressed such concerns (Solstad et al., 2016).

7. Summing-up and discussion

In Norway it was the rural areas which first enjoyed a kind of compulsory education provision as early as in 1739, although not until 1780 in the northernmost parts of the country (Tveit, 2004). This

⁶ The document *Overordnet del – verdier og prinsipper for grunnopplæringen* (Overarching part - values and principles for primary and secondary education) was settled by the government as a “royal solution” by September 2017. The new curricular plan which it is part of, will be implemented from 2020 onwards.

limited ambulatory type of schooling took place in local homes, so this was definitely rural education in terms of localisation.

Nation building and the strive for independence created a positive attitude towards the relatively “unspoilt” rural culture, language, way of life etc. among academics and left leaning politicians during the second half of the 19th century. The National Rural Education Act of 1889 represented a marked lift in education provision with more schooling in purpose-built school houses and the abolishment of the “undivided” school where possible. Thus, this 1889 school act also marked the beginning of the process of centralising rural education (Dokka, 1967), which reached a peak during the first couple of decades after WW II. With the urban schools naturally applying single grade classes accepted as the ideal to strive for, and an urban middle class knowledge base – content of education – taken for granted, these processes also resulted in an urbanisation of rural education which lasted until around 1970.

The political, and to a large extent also professional, idea guiding these developments within Norwegian compulsory education since the end of the 19th century up and to the 1960s was that of *equity through equality* (or *sameness*). A just and fair education provision throughout the country could best be secured if all children were offered the same school in terms of curriculum and as far as possible also with respect to organisation. Especially in sparsely populated rural areas, the result was extensive school closures as soon as improved infrastructure allowed for school transportation in post WWII years.

As to organisation, the consequences of the *equity through equality*-model is most clearly demonstrated by looking at the implementation of the extension of compulsory education from seven to nine years in the 1960s. The requirement of at least 60 pupils to establish a youth school, meant that pupils in SPA needed lengthy school transportation or away-from-home lodging. Strong popular resistance to massive school centralisation during the 1950s and 1960s combined with empirical findings as to the functioning of the *equity through equality*-principle as well as with developments within theories of learning, new perspectives on knowledge and on socially constructed ‘realities’ gradually paved the way for an *equity through diversity*-model during the 1970s and 80s. An equitable education could also be provided by small school units, and multi-grade teaching could even be practised at lower secondary level. Furthermore, the best way to promote learning and foster social and intellectual development among all children was to relate the school curricula to the concepts and perspectives the pupils had already acquired, and to make use of the local environment throughout the years of schooling. According to the national curricula of 1987 and 1997 schools in rural areas were allowed to, ought to, or even should, be ‘rural’.

Solstad (1997) depicted three types of school–local community relationships: the *community ignorant*, the *community passive*, and the *community active* school. The *community ignorant* school do not take much notice of its surroundings. The ideal is to provide an equal education across geographical and cultural settings. The curriculum is strictly defined by national textbooks, and the school structure in rural areas should be as centralised as possible to approach the model of schools with single-grade classes only. *Equity through equal treatment* or *sameness* is the credo on which this model is founded. The *community passive* school takes into account the pupils’ cultural and social background as well as the physical surroundings of the school and may even invite in local resource persons. In principle, such a school is compatible with the *equity through diversity*-doctrine. Although such schools are labelled ‘passive’, they may indirectly and over time play a role in the local community by strengthening the pupils’ self-confidence and ties to the local area or by qualifying and motivating young people for further training and education that is relevant to the economy of the area. The *community active* school goes a step further. It not only brings the nearby outer world into the school, but also engages itself actively in local community undertakings in cooperation with other public sectors and with local associations, organisations, industries and

individuals. This is the advanced version of the *equity through diversity*-school. Table 2 relates these types of school–community relationships to the two conceptions of how to achieve an equitable education provision.

In Table 2 the line drawn between period (column 1) and characteristics of national curricula (column 3) must be interpreted with caution. In the 18th and 19th centuries the idea of equity in education was not an issue within the governing circles. The period 1737–1920 indicates that in terms of organisation or school structure, the rural schools were allowed to be just rural. The *community passive* school was barely hinted at in M74 (placed in brackets) but came clearly across in M87 and L97. Similarly, the *community active* school which was vaguely suggested in M87, was made explicit in the L97 curriculum (columns 4, 5).

Well before the legislations and directives which formalised a ‘ruralisation’ of rural education in Norway through the national curricula of 1987 and 1997, new international trends were threatening the implementation of these policies and signalling a reversal of the processes. We identified four related faces of globalization of particular importance for rural education and rural communities generally: neoliberalism, New Public Management, supra-national organisations/agencies, and the ICT-related compression of time and space. The influence of these globalising forces increased during the 1980s and 1990s at the same time as national curricular changes asked for place-based learning and for schools to play an extended role in their local communities. By inspecting the curricular changes on this side of the millennium shift, LK06 and the ongoing renewal process, we have also demonstrated a reverse development. Apparently, the *community ignorant* school is again formally acceptable. To practise a local community relevant education, either according to the *community passive* or the *community active* model seems to be increasingly more difficult as the location of the prevailing national curriculum, LK06, in Table 2 above indicates. In a purely rural education perspective, the globalisation inspired measures and developments make place-based learning risky or a “waste of time”. This brings us back towards the *local community ignorant* model of the pre-1970s as illustrated in Table 2, columns 1 and 4. It is not only the formal recommendations or directives for practicing a diversity model allowing rural schools to be rural which are lost. The globalised market driven test regimes do probably effectively deter school leaders and teachers from practising place-based learning or involving themselves in community undertakings even if they consider such activities educationally and socially worthwhile and within the limitations of the formal national curriculum (Lundgren, 2014; Sjøberg, 2014).

The most notable consequence of these globalisation related developments for rural communities is that more and more rural communities lose their school. This does, regardless of the type of school, reduce the attractiveness and sustainability of the community. In addition, the community is robbed of the potential benefits of a *community active* school playing an active role in community life; culturally, socially and economically. Understandably, municipal decisions to close schools, are often made despite strong local mobilisation to save the school (Solstad, 2009, pp. 108–111). In addition to financial pressure, notions of quality depending on size is gaining ground, reflecting a shift back towards equity through equality. A consequence of school centralisation that has not been given the attention it deserves, is the impact on health and wellbeing of the increasing number of pupils having to endure lengthy school journeys.

In conclusion, this historical analysis of 300 years of rural education demonstrates how lawmakers at the national level may introduce laws and regulations to strengthen rural education and rural communities which in fact may function at least partially contradictory to rural interests. For instance, whereas the 1889 Rural Education Act and its 1936 successor both aimed at strengthening rural primary education, the general acceptance of the urban, middle class based schools as being the model to strive for, paved the way for a compulsory education in

Table 2
The relationship between the conception of equity and aspects of school-community connections.

Mode of equity	Period (1)	School-community relationship (2)	School structure (3)	Pedagogical use of local resources (4)	School involved in community undertakings (5)
Equity through equality/sameness	Around 1920–1970 (Ca. 2000→)	The community ignorant school	Centralised – rural schools as big as possible	Not an issue (LK06)	No
Equity through diversity/unequal treatment	(1737-ca. 1920) Ca. 1970–2000	The community passive school The community active school	Decentralised – small schools allowed Decentralised – small schools vital	Allowed and preferable(M74); M87; L97 Important and widespread M87; L97; (LK06)	No M74; (LK06) Yes(M87); L97

rural areas which in its content and organisation did not make the optimal match with rural needs and preconditions. Similarly, there is a clear contradiction between the 1986 decentralising measures as to the financial running of compulsory education, and the curricular recommendations – and even demands - to build upon local learning resources and engage actively with the local community. The decentralisation of power combined with limited budgetary transfers, resulted in massive school centralisation which left numerous rural communities without a school that could become the resource which the curriculum asked it to be, both for the pupils and the local community.

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